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TAGS: PREL PTER LE SY
SUBJECT: LEBANON: GEIR PEDERSEN ON ANNAN'S VISIT

REF: BEIRUT 2797

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Feltman, Ambassador. Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (S/NF) On August 29, the UNSYG's Personal Representative for Lebanon Geir Pedersen and UN Senior Political Affairs Officer Salman Sheikh (please protect both throughout) briefed Ambassador Feltman and poloff on UNSYG Kofi Annan's Beirut meetings on August 28. While Pedersen covered much of the same information conveyed to the Ambassador by UN envoy Terje Roed-Larsen earlier on August 29 (reftel), he provided a read-out of Annan's meeting with Hizballah Minister of Energy Mohammad Fneish (at which meeting Larsen, much to his chagrin, had not been present). Pedersen said that Annan also met briefly with Justice Minister Charles Rizk, who asked for UN Legal Advisor Michel to come to Lebanon as soon as possible to sign the agreement for the special tribunal to try suspects in the Hariri assassination (and possibly other attacks). The Ambassador asked specifically about Annan's comments to the GOL on arms smuggling. Pedersen said that Annan had not pushed this as much as other issues - such as prisoner exchange - but that Siniora agrees to UN maritime patrols along the coast of Lebanon. However, there no further clarity emerged regarding the Lebanon-Syria frontier.

Towards the end of the meeting, Sheikh showed poloff a memcon of a UNIFIL-LAF meeting indicating that the UN has asked the GOL to provide a comprehensive report on measures taken to secure points of entry and further GOL needs. Finally, Sheikh and Pedersen provided a rough sketch of how they believe the Lebanon UN mission should be structured in order to be most effective. END SUMMARY.

INCIDENT IN THE SOUTHERN SUBURBS

¶2. (S/NF) The Ambassador criticized the decision by Pedersen's office for Annan to go on a walking tour of the southern suburbs. Pedersen, obviously upset by the whole episode, said that Hizballah had "screwed us in a big way" by staging a pro-Hizballah, anti-UN/US/GOL protest during the delegation's visit to the suburbs. "It was the worst thing they could have done," Pedersen remarked, admitting that Larsen had borne the brunt of the protestors' anger for comments he had made which supposedly, in Hizballah's warped mind, invited a renewed Israeli bombing campaign on Lebanon. The Ambassador suggested that perhaps this incident might now

convince Pedersen, who maintains close contact with Hizballah at the behest of certain of his staff, that the group is not to be trusted. It is also of concern that Hizballah knew the exact time and place of Annan's arrival, who was supposedly under GOL protection. The Ambassador noted that the incident was easily predictable and that proceeding on the visit to the southern suburbs was ill advised.

MEETING WITH FNEISH

¶3. (S/NF) Pedersen provided a read-out of Annan's meeting with Hizballah Minister Mohammad Fneish (the more serious of the Hizballah duo in the Cabinet, the other being Labor Minister Trad Hamadeh, who is always careful to claim he is not a Hizballah member, just supporter and ally). The only other people in the meeting were Pedersen and a Hizballah translator. Larsen was not invited to join. Annan told Fneish that Hizballah must find a way to peacefully disarm now, adding that it is important for the unity, stability, and diversity of Lebanon that no one group in the country be afraid of any other. Fneish did not respond directly to this, but said simply that Hizballah respects UNSCR 1701, welcomes the deployment of UNIFIL, and will not respond to Israeli "provocations". Fneish said the main Hizballah concerns are land mines, Sheba'a Farms, and prisoners, which to Pedersen was Fneish's indirect way of giving the Hizballah conditions for disarmament. "It's important that they didn't raise the bar," said Pedersen optimistically. Pedersen noted also that Fneish attacked Larsen during the meeting about what Hizballah claims were his provocative comments.

¶4. (S/NF) Annan discussed the issue of prisoners, urging

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Hizballah to hand them over as a "humanitarian gesture", and offering to act as arbitrator for an exchange. Fneish replied that he was not authorized to speak on the prisoners' issue during the meeting. Hizballah later contacted Pedersen to say that they would accept Annan's offer of arbitration. Pedersen said there was no information given on the whereabouts or well-being of the two captured Israeli soldiers.

MEETING ON SPECIAL TRIBUNAL

¶5. (S/NF) Pedersen said that Annan had a brief, "five-minute" meeting with Justice Minister Charles Rizk to discuss the "special tribunal with international character" to try suspects in the Hariri assassination (and possibly other attacks). Rizk had asked for UN Legal Advisor Nicholas Michel to come to Lebanon quickly in order to sign the agreement on the tribunal. Pedersen said that Michel had also called him to say he wants to come soon. (Note. Annan had considered a meeting with President Lahoud, with Pedersen advising against it. Annan decided to raise it through Rizk, a close friend of Lahoud's who -- as with most Maronites -- entertains his own presidential ambitions. Pedersen reported that Rizk "did not want to get involved" in setting something up with Lahoud. End Note.)

OTHER MEETINGS

¶6. (S/NF) As Larsen reported earlier, Pedersen said that Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri had been positive and supportive during his meeting with Annan, but clearly does not want to touch the prisoner exchange issue, perhaps since he does not expect it to be solved easily. Pedersen said Annan, who had a dim view of Berri based on earlier meetings, had been impressed with Berri this time, as the Speaker gave a "very serious, statesmanlike performance."

¶7. (S/NF) Pedersen said that in the meeting with Siniora, the PM focused on ending the air and sea blockade of Lebanon

and ensuring the complete IDF withdrawal as soon as possible.

The Secretary-General, who has made public statements calling for an end to the blockade, agreed that the Israelis should not be "the referees" as to whether the GOL has done enough on monitoring -- that is the UN's role. As Larsen also reported, Annan suggested mediating a meeting between Siniora and Bashar al-Asad in "a neutral location" -- Larsen said Cyprus. Siniora agreed to the idea, but Pedersen suspected that Asad would likely reject it, which would be bad publicity for him. Annan was also very impressed with Siniora, who Pedersen says has "matured" since he first took office.

¶18. (S/NF) Annan also had a security meeting with Siniora, Defense Minister Elias Murr, Acting Interior Minister Ahmad Fatfat, LAF chief General Michel Sleiman, LAF G2 Intelligence chief George Khoury, ISF commander Ashraf Rifi, and others during which they discussed LAF/UNIFIL coordination on deployments. While Larsen said that UNIFIL commander Pelligrini had been mum at the meeting about coordination issues, Pedersen said that the UN side raised concerns that coordination below the senior levels is lacking. They also queried why the LAF was not deploying up to the Blue Line in the Sheba'a Farms area, which surprised Murr and Sleiman, who thought the LAF had done so.

¶19. (S/NF) Pedersen said Sleiman also gave details on the LAF deployment of 8600 troops to the Lebanon-Syria border. "Sleiman was very firm on this," said Pedersen, "He admitted they haven't stopped everything." The Ambassador noted that the Embassy assessment of the LAF troop numbers on the border was much less than the purported 8600, and suggested that the GOL could request UNIFIL to send a small team to verify the numbers. Pedersen promised to discuss this with Murr. He said that Annan reiterated that the GOL just has to ask for help from UNIFIL regarding the Lebanon-Syria border, and it will be provided.

¶10. (S/NF) Pedersen said that Siniora has no problem with accepting UNIFIL maritime patrols, which will be composed of German, Dutch, Danish, and Norwegian naval forces. The

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Germans have offered a naval task force to patrol the entire Lebanese coastline. Pedersen said that the UNIFIL officers thought an advance contingent of naval forces could be in Lebanese waters by "the end of the week". The Ambassador queried this since the contingents still needed to get political approval from their capitals. Shaykh also pointed out that there are still some concerns about the UNIFIL naval Rules of Engagement.

¶11. (S/NF) Annan also pushed the Lebanese for a resumption of the 1949 Armistice Agreement, and discussed this in some detail privately with Siniora. According to the armistice, the UNSYG has the right to amend the agreement. Annan suggested that a political meeting be set up at the level of Defense Ministers. Siniora balked at this, but said he would support higher-level military meetings (perhaps on the level of LAF chief Sleiman). Pedersen noted that if the 1949 Armistice Agreement were to be reactivated, that Hizballah and Syria could still play the role of spoilers, but then that would reveal their true face. (Comment: As if there isn't already sufficient evidence of their "true face." End comment.)

UN MEMCON REGARDING MONITORING SUPPORT

¶12. (S/NF) Shaykh (again, please protect) handed poloff a highlighted copy of a memorandum to DPKO U/SYG Guehenno of an August 28 meeting between Pelligrini and LAF General Shaaythy (who has been liaising for the LAF with UNIFIL and the IDF). Pelligrini writes that he asked Shaaythy to "present a comprehensive report of all measures they (the LAF) have taken (on securing points of entry) and the kind of

assistance they require from UNIFIL". Shaaythy promised to ask Siniora to prepare such a report and to "address to the UN a specific request to verify the security of the borders and all entry points." Shaaythy also said the GOL requests UNIFIL naval contingents "all along" Lebanon's shores, as well as air patrols.

UN LEBANON MISSION STRUCTURE

¶13. (S/NF) Discussing the possibility that Annan may assign a Special Representative (SRSG) for Lebanon, both Pedersen and Shaykh said that the French and Italians would never accept civilian control over the military mission in Lebanon.

Both are also deeply surprised that Annan would deploy a SRSG so close to the end of his term. Pedersen asked Shaykh to show us a diagram for their suggested structure for the UN mission in Lebanon. In their scheme, which makes a great deal of sense, the office would be headed by a Special Coordinator (SC) who would directly oversee the political, humanitarian, and information sections of the mission. Each section would have a coordinator, while the political section would have an additional five officers and the humanitarian section a further two officers. The SC would not directly oversee the UNIFIL forces but would liaise directly with the force commander (the SC's office would have a military liaison and UNIFIL headquarters in Lebanon would have a political liaison). Pedersen and Shaykh -- who made sure poloff copied the sketch in detail -- argued that this would be a much lighter, less bureaucratic structure which would alleviate UNIFIL TCCs' fears about civilian control of the military mission.

FELTMAN